

Starting at the Very Beginning



By *Anita McAnear*

As the volume of *L&L* closes, I usually take some time to reflect on what we have done over the year as a magazine and what has happened in the field.

We currently have infrastructure and technology for integrated systems that combine data, curriculum, resources, tools, assessments, delivery, and reporting, all at the fingertips of educators. Driven by NCLB, efforts are underway to build these systems at the state and district levels.

NCLB emphasizes research-proven instructional strategies, especially for reading and math. But starting with instructional strategies seems to be missing a couple of steps. Research in the past 10 years has revealed much information about how the brain works and about how children learn. This is where we need to start in planning how to best integrate technology into teaching and learning. Has your school, district, or educational agency reviewed that research and gotten all staff on board with a vision of what

it means? Although focused on how technology supports the model for how students learn, the articles by Barbara Kurshan and Tom Sherman in the December/January 2004–05 (pp. 6–11) and February 2005 (pp. 10–13, 39) issues highlight a research-based model of how students learn.

The next step would seem to be asking the question: What should students be learning?

There may be other models, but the understanding by design model with curriculum mapping, proposed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe and promoted and supported by ASCD, is a compelling one. A necessary second step is for school/district staff to do the curriculum mapping and develop the big questions that should drive instruction. Pamela Morehead and Barbara LaBeau described the curriculum mapping process for their elementary school in the December/January issue (pp. 12–17).

Once everyone is on board with a model of how students learn and a curriculum of what they should be learning, they can look at instructional strategies that fit with the model of how students learn for delivering their

curriculum. A myriad of research-backed strategies exist, including differentiated instruction, project-based learning, cooperative learning, and the strategies identified by Robert Marzano. We have published numerous articles on how technology supports these instructional strategies.

The important concept is that we need a framework to hang these instructional strategies on. They aren't effective unless we know what to teach and have a model of how students really learn. And professional development is paramount if all staff are to be on board with development and implementation.

A similar analogy can be made for technology. It can't by itself improve learning, but combined with a well-thought out learning model and curriculum plan including instructional strategies, it can accelerate the process from development to results.

We know that many schools and districts are putting these ideas into place. We want to hear your stories and include them in our next volume of *L&L*. Enjoy your summer break and look for your next issue of *L&L* in September 2005!

Anita